



# Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **2021 Howard County Health Assessment Survey Reveals New Areas of Focus**

**Columbia, MD** – Results from the 2021 biennial Howard County Health Assessment Survey have just been released revealing several new focus areas. The survey, first conducted in 2012, and updated in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2021, was postponed in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 2,031 residents over the age of 18 were surveyed by phone and online. Partner organizations Horizon Foundation, Howard County Health Department, Howard County General Hospital and the Columbia Association sponsored this study, the goal of which was to assess health-related behaviors and risk factors among the adult population of Howard County.

“Results of this study enable health leaders, providers and advocates to measure progress towards better health of the population, to address health disparities and to better understand where health and medical resources are needed” said Dr. Maura J. Rossman, Howard County Health Officer.

"As a data-informed, people-driven administration, it's essential we have this type of assessment to show us how we can continue to improve our services with innovative strategies to eliminate the disparities that exist in our community," said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball.

Three key areas were identified as overarching themes under which survey results were grouped. Those areas are: Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder, Chronic Disease and Healthy Lifestyle, and Healthcare Systems and Health Literacy. In the area of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder, findings indicated that symptoms of poor mental health have increased. The increasing trend in respondents having mental health conditions also continues from previous years. Respondents reported mental health concerns in children as well. There has been an increase in binge drinking, vaping and opioid use.

In the Chronic Disease and Healthy Lifestyle category, diabetes, asthma and hypertension continued to rise. More than a third of residents were told to lose weight and more children were told they were overweight. Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption increased. Fruit and vegetable consumption

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improved but did not meet daily required amounts. Overall, a majority of Howard County residents remained active during the pandemic with a significant emphasis on exercising outdoors.

"It has never been more important for the Columbia community and the greater Howard County community to prioritize our wellness," Columbia Association President/CEO Lakey Boyd said.

"Everyone deserves to enjoy a healthy lifestyle, and Columbia Association is proud to be a leader in providing a diverse array of spaces - indoors and outdoors - where we can welcome everyone from yogis to skaters, walkers, golfers, runners, hikers, swimmers, martial artists, cyclists, tennis players, pickleball enthusiasts and many more."

In the category of Healthcare Systems and Health Literacy, the use of healthcare systems changed during the pandemic with increased use of emergency departments and decreased preventative screenings, such as cancer screenings and dental visits. Many respondents reported being caregivers and the use of advanced directives to plan care increased.

Partner organizations will distill the data and develop initiatives and strategies to address areas of improvement specifically related to their areas of expertise. Collaborative efforts have already begun in overlapping areas of concern, like diabetes and mental health.

The survey in its entirety may be found on the Howard County Health Department's web page.

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/health/reports-data> .

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